DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 796 SO 018 110

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TITLE Where We Stand: Comparative Study of Japanese and Kentucky Educational Requirements.
PUB DATE 3 Apr 87
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; *Extended School Year; Foreign Countries; *Mathematics Achievement; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Second Language Learning; Teacher Salaries; Teacher Student Ratio; *Tutoring
IDENTIFIERS *Japan; *Kentucky

ABSTRACT

The educational systems and requirements of Japan and Kentucky are compared in seven different areas. The first area compares total instruction days and illustrates the differences with a chart. Kentucky requires 175 days of instruction while Japan requires 240 days. Because of this Japanese students spend 150 to 300 more hours per year in school than Kentucky students. The second area describes the "Juku" or private tutoring system. Besides the fact that Japanese students spend more hours in school, 60% of public and 90% of private school students enroll in relatively inexpensive private tutoring sessions after school to prepare for school entrance examinations. The third area of comparison is the mathematics requirements of Japan and Kentucky. An outstanding U.S. high school in Kentucky offers courses in algebra (two levels), geometry, and calculus while a typical Japanese high school offers algebra, geometry, basic analysis, differential and integral calculus, and probability and statistics. The course offerings plus time spent in the classroom account for the difference in U.S. and Japanese mathematics test scores. The fourth area describes the foreign language requirements which Japanese students must take from grade seven until graduation. English is mandatory and the student is allowed to choose between French, German, or Spanish as the second language. The fifth area describes parent and teacher involvement in Japanese schools. Japanese society respects scholars and believes that education is the only means to a successful career. Therefore, parents sacrifice for their children's education and do not complain when their child is disciplined in school. Area six compares the teacher-student ratio which is 1 to 15 in Japan and 1 to 30 in Kentucky. The seventh area reviews Japanese legislation which has raised the rank and salary of all public teachers and college professors. (APG)

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WHERE WE STAND: COMPARATIVE STUDY OF JAPANESE AND KENTUCKY EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS.

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April 3, 1987

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Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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INTRODUCTION

According to a newspaper article in the Louisville Courier Journal on December 12, 1983 concerning a study conducted by the Dallas Times Herald, the difference in academic achievement between American and Japanese sixth-grade students, particularly in mathematics is striking. The study reported results of a test given to students in Australia, Canada, England, France, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland, and to students at two Dallas schools. Japanese students won the highest place in mathematics while U.S. students finished last. In fact U.S. students finished last in seven of 19 test administered, and they ranked first or second on none. In January 1985 I had a chance to visit Japan and during this visit interviews were held with Mr. Akinaga Maeda of the Mitaka-Shi Board of Education, with Mr. Kazuo Miyoshi, principal of the Hanesawa Elementary School, and with Mr. Morio Kuwagaya, head teacher in the International Christian University High School, all in Tokyo. The following data concerning the overall curriculum design, the specific subject requirements in hours for various levels and the principles and practice of the basic Japanese system of education from elementary through high school (grade 1-12) were gained during these interviews.

1. Total Instruction Days Required

The following chart depicts an outline of the minimum number of hours per week by grade level required by each of Kentucky and Japan in the study of various subject areas. The weekly minimum instructional requirements and the total hours for year at each grade level are summarized.

Grade	Subjects / Countries	Language Arts	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies	Fine Arts	Physical Ed.	Health	Optional Hours	Electives: Fine Arts & Foreign Lang	Total for week	Total School Days	Total for year
1	Kentucky	750 Minu.	300 Minu.	120 minu.	120 minu.	120 minu.	100 minu.	60 minu.	230 minu.		30 Hrs.	175 Days	1050 Hrs.
	Japan	480	240	120	135	180	180		165		25	240	1200
2	Kentucky	750	300	120	120	120	100	60	230		30	175	1050
	Japan	480	240	120	135	180	180		165		25	240	1200
3	Kentucky	750	300	120	120	120	100	60	230		30	175	1050
	Japan	480	240	135	180	180	180		285		28	240	1344
4	Kentucky	750	300	120	120	120	100	60	230		30	175	1050
	Japan	480	300	135	180	180	180		285		28	240	1344
5	Kentucky	750	300	120	120	120	100	60	230		30	175	1050
	Japan	300	300	135	180	180	180		285		28	240	1344
6	Kentucky	300	225	225	225	405	75	60	285		30	175	1050
	Japan	270	300	135	180	180	180		285		28	240	1344
7	Kentucky	300	225	225	225	405	75	60	285		30	175	1050
	Japan	420	240	180	240	240	300		480		35	240	1680
8	Kentucky	300	225	225	225	405	75	60	285		30	175	1050
	Japan	420	240	180	240	240	300		480		35	240	1680
9	Kentucky	300	225	150	150		37.5	37.5		600	30	175	1050
	Japan	420	240	240	240	180	300		480		35	240	1680
10	Kentucky	300	225	150	150		37.5	37.5		600	30	175	1050
	Japan	360	300	240	240	120	180			600	35	240	1680
11	Kentucky	300	225	150	150		37.5	37.5		600	30	175	1050
	Japan	360	300	240	240	120	180			600	35	240	1680
12	Kentucky	300	225	150	150		37.5	37.5		600	30	175	1050
	Japan	360	300	240	240	120	180			600	35	240	1680

As one may notice upon examining the total number of hours for a week and for the years, for instance in grade one, a question may arise, since Kentucky requires more hours per week but actually fewer for the school year. The reason for this is that the minimum number of instructional days per year for Kentucky is 175 while Japan requires 240 days. Also Kentucky, typical of all U.S. schools, conducts classes only five days per week, Monday through Friday, whereas Japan has six days of classes, Monday through Saturday. Thus during the first two grades Japan teaches its pupils for an additional 150 hours per year. From grades three through six a total of almost 300 additional hours per year is spent by Japanese students over and above the hours spent by Kentucky students in their classes.

2. "Juku" System or Private Tutoring System

Besides the fact that all Japanese students spend more hours in school than Kentucky students, many students are enrolled in private tutoring programs after school, the "Katushu Juku", nicknamed "Juku". These programs are inexpensive and readily accessible to almost any Japanese student. About 60% of the public school students and 90% of the private school enrollees participate in these programs. Parents usually encourage their children to take part, especially around the time for the school entrance exams. After the sixth grade Japanese students must pass an entrance exam before entering middle school (grade 7-9); after middle school an entrance exam must be passed before entering high school (grade 10-12). Of course, entrance exams must be passed before university study. Because of these exams all students are highly concerned with doing well in their studies, and the tutoring business in Japan is flourishing.

3. Mathematics Requirement

After observing the striking difference in mathematics achievement between students in these two countries, the course-requirements of selected schools in each country were compared. For example Murray High School, which was selected as an outstanding high school in the U.S. by the Department of Education, offers courses in algebra (two levels), geometry and calculus. Meanwhile, one typical Japanese high school visited in Tokyo offers courses in algebra, geometry, basic analysis, differential and integral calculus, and probability and statistics. This simple example shows a clear contrast between the best the U.S. has to offer and the average offering of a Japanese school. The fact alone that Japanese pupils spend so many more hours studying on these subjects would insure their knowing more and in greater depth. However not only are more hours spent, but more requirements for Japanese students in more areas at higher levels are commonplace.

4. Two Foreign Languages Requirement

Concerning elective courses a most interesting point is that Japan requires its students from grade seven to take one course in English and one in either French, German or Spanish. The courses are at least four hours per week, forty weeks a year, for six years. English is mandatory; the student is allowed to choose the other language. The reason why two foreign languages are required is that the Japanese believe that the mastering of difficult subjects serves well to discipline growing minds.

5. Parents' and Teachers' Involvement

Japanese society has come under much Confucian influence, whereby scholars are most respected. Most people believe that education is the only means to a successful career. Generally, all parents are willing to sacrifice for their children's education, and teachers are willing to give extra tutoring after school to groups of talented students, who may sometimes even meet regularly at the teacher's house for this purpose. Academic achievement is praised and generally is considered, in the media, more laudable than even athletics. There are numerous contests whose results are publicized broadly and whose winners are held in admiration. Japanese teachers give very strict discipline to their students, and it is almost unthinkable, according to Mr. Miyoshi, for a parent to complain if his child is disciplined by a teacher. There is an old oriental saying which effectively states that the teacher is like a third parent to each of his charges. Also the students are assigned responsibilities to keep their schools and classrooms, including restroom, clean. It is interesting to note that in all the schools and restrooms toured the walls, floors, and other surfaces were spotless.

6. Teacher - Student Ratio

Another very striking figure is that the average ration of teachers and students in Japan is one to fifteen while in Kentucky this figure is about one to thirty.

7. Special Legislation For Teachers

According to Mr. Miyoshi, Japan has passed special legislation that all public teachers, including college professors, have been raised in rank as government employees. Formerly they were rated as "C" whereas now all educators by law have been awarded the highest rank of "A" and thus earn higher salaries associated with the higher grades. Mr. Miyoshi also mentioned that Japanese schools are making a conscious effort to prepare their students to be able to do well anywhere in the world. Their legislators realized that the first step toward improving education was to raise the teachers' status. They regarded it as an investment for the future wealth of the nation. Competition among aspiring teachers is high and accomplished instructors are accorded high respect by the society overall.

Since Kentucky is now studying to strive toward educational excellence, studying different countries for their educational theories and practices will help to broaden and to deepen our understanding of Kentucky's educational problems. Such comparisons help us to examine ourselves and to see how to measure our own educational problems and achievements.